My semester abroad was an incredible experience, and vastly enhanced my academic career. This report will cover some highlights of the trip, some challenges, and some important things I wish I had known before going. I would highly recommend this program for anyone looking to enrich their academic experience and see more of the world.

Before leaving, researching classes and trying to figure out Monash’s website and course book was a little intimidating and overwhelming. I really relied on the resources provided by the SFU study abroad website, including this list of past exchange credit history, and reports from students who had already gone on exchange. I cannot emphasize enough how helpful these were – taking the time to read them and taking screen shots of important information was a great way to get an idea of what to expect. While it was overwhelming to begin with, I worked through it and eventually had a good grasp on how the system and courses worked at Monash, and everything course related after that was a breeze.

I was at Monash during Semester One, from February to June. In terms of packing, I wish I had brought a lot warmer clothing. I was anticipating quite hot weather for the whole time I was there, when in reality it was only warm for about the first few weeks, and then it turned into Vancouver autumn weather – though a little less rainy. By the time I left in June, it was around 8 or 10-degrees most days.

Something I didn’t know before going was how much I would have to purchase in home goods. I was living on the Clayton campus of Monash University, and while I really liked living on campus, there was a considerable initial output to purchase things for my room like bedding, a table lamp, storage containers, as well as kitchen goods, like pots, pans, dishes, cutlery, etc, as none of this is provided. I bought everything new from K-mart, Target, and Ikea, but I wish I had sought out more second-hand or donated goods to cut down on these costs, especially because I wasn’t planning on returning home with any of the things I was buying.

Another thing I didn’t realize before going is that this campus is about an hour from the city by train, which is something I wish I had known. Despite this, it was a really great experience living on campus, and I think it made everything easier and smoother. There was a ton of community support, outings to local shops, activities and events, and – most importantly – free food! Richardson Hall (fondly referred to as Richo) was very accepting and open to all of their residents and focused a lot on respect and building a great community. At the same time, there was definitely many opportunities to party and have fun – you will definitely end up at Dooley’s or The Nott on a Wednesday or Thursday night if you live at Clayton.
Academically, I found Monash to be pretty comparable to SFU. The lectures and tutorials held for my courses were very similar to the format I was used to. Only thing different was the grading scale, which was a little tougher than SFU’s system.

In terms of meeting new people and making friends, the most beneficial thing I found was to just go to things! While it could sometimes be a challenge, even if I didn’t feel like it I would push myself to leave my room and actually attend events that my hall or the university was holding. They were a casual and fun way to get to know everyone you are living with and find your people for the duration of the exchange. By the end, my friends and I were out every weekend for brunch, checking out cool restaurants and bars in the city, and exploring new parts of Melbourne. Even though it was overwhelming and scary to be so far from home and in an unfamiliar place, in the end it worked out great and I wouldn’t change anything.

As far as living expenses go, it was pretty comparable to Vancouver, perhaps a little more expensive when eating out in the city. Living on campus, I spent around $1100 each month on rent, and then around $800-$900 in other living expenses, such as groceries, eating out, activities, etc. I found it really helpful to open a bank account at Commonwealth Bank. There is a branch on campus, and they make it very simple. I opened a student account online before I left, wired myself funds, and then obtained a debit Mastercard once I arrived, which I used for most of my purchases. I used a Myki card to pay for transit (the equivalent of a compass card), and specifically requested the student Myki – it was a bit of a hassle to obtain this, but it was definitely worth it as it cut the maximum daily fare in half.

Melbourne itself, while expensive and a ways from campus, was definitely a city worth exploring. The CBD (central business district) offers really cool streets and laneways to explore with beautiful street art, cool little hidden bars, and endless restaurants and cafes to try. The coffee was incredible everywhere – my favourite cup being from Industry Bean café in a sub-district of Melbourne called Fitzroy. As a student, I was always looking for budget activities to partake in and found a lot of exciting yet cheap events like live music, comedy shows, and free walking tours.

The experience taught me to always stay open to new opportunities. To other students considering going to Monash, I would tell them to go for it! I would say don’t study too hard, definitely focus on getting out and meeting new people, because that it what is going to make the experience memorable. I would also say to try and take as many trips as possible around Australia while you are there. I took several little trips around the East Coast, using the budget airlines JetStar and Tigerair, and it was definitely possible to see more of the country while still on a budget. Meeting great friends and doing little trips in between really helped keep the homesickness at bay and make the exchange semester a well-rounded and
full experience. I am so glad I decided to do a semester abroad – it was an invaluable opportunity that taught me so much about myself and the world around me.

Out for brunch – a weekly occurrence in Melbourne.
A sub-district of Melbourne called Fitzroy – a cool area to explore in the city!

Road trip along *The Great Ocean Road* – a must-do while in Melbourne!
The Twelve Apostles (along The Great Ocean Road)

The State Library Victoria – another must-see in Melbourne’s CBD!